2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1967 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

p xx

487
102
315

with the greatly-extended air services which had developed since those early days.

The radio officer came and reported that he had received the 'all clear' from the flying-boat. We locked up the rest-house, dismissed the serangs, and crowded into the two station wagons which were to take us the ten miles to the Fort. It was a tight squeeze, with bearers and clerks sitting on each others' knees in the back seat, but since transport is scarce in the desert, I found this was the customary way of travelling.

There was a track of sorts,* beaten out by the wheels of countless vehicles, which wound its way around the sand dunes and the date palms. In hot weather the desert is as hard as a macadam road, and one can drive almost anywhere, but in the season of the rains flooding is frequent, and once you get stuck in a soft patch nothing less than a four-wheel drive truck with a crane will get you out. So we stuck to the road and did a fairly comfortable thirty miles an hour through the most monotonous country I have ever seen. Fortunately the rest of the desert is not like this. Between Sharjah and Dubai the landscape is as flat as a table, and the sand a dun, muddy grey, without a single bit of scrub or camel grass to relieve it.

There was little activity on the road. A flock of black goats scattered as we drove past, the young herdsman casting us a scared glance. A fat merchant on a donkey, his bare legs almost touching the ground, trotted by, a dignified expression on his face which contrasted comically with his primitive mode of travel. Away to the dunes on our left, a train of loaded camels trudged majestically towards a Bedouin encampment, their riders carrying long, silver-chased rifles. Ahead there gleamed in the sun what looked like a wide, shallow lake. Our driver made straight towards it; as we advanced so it receded, and eventually it evaporated into the air. I have often heard it said that these mirages are due to heat reflection, but an old Arab whom I knew said they were caused by the salt crystals and silicates in the sand, which reflected the sun like a mirror. Science may not accept his theory, but I have often picked up large flakes of salt from the desert which sparkled like fragments of glass.

We approached the village of Khan, a small dependancy of Sharjah, whose minarets and white-walled houses appeared to float in the air like a fairy city—again the effect of a mirage. Five more miles and we skirted a high range of sand dunes and soon glimpsed the radio masts and white, crenellated walls of our fortress home. A mile behind it the dun stone walls of the sheikh's palace

*[Between Dubai and Sharjah, ca. 10 miles apart -- Ahlust]

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

really a most lovable ruffian, his Christ-like face contrasting oddly with the fanatical fire in his eyes. Hussein, his minister, despite his dirty clothes and unkempt beard, also amused me very much; he carried a huge sword, whilst his belt was always bulging with weapons—knives, Muscat daggers, and a Mauser pistol. He was the living embodiment of Captain Teach, the eighteenth century pirate.

Sheikh Raschid was always pestering me to visit his 'palace' at Ajman and accompany him on a gazelle hunt so, partly in order to placate him and partly because I liked the rascal, I eventually agreed to accept his invitation. I chose a week-end in May when, owing to bad weather at Barhain and Karachi, aircraft had been held up for a few days. Ellis, the Station Engineer, who had performed several tasks for the sheikh, was also invited, and we made arrangements to set off in one of the cars after lunch. A few minutes before we were due to leave the Fort three camels put in an appearance. The servant who brought them explained that Sheikh Raschid bin Hamid considered that they would be more comfortable for the journey.

As a rule I dislike riding camels; I consider they are one of the most uncomfortable modes of transport ever discovered. In this case, however, I was glad of them. The route to Ajman lies through tracks of deep, soft sand, in which the tyres of vehicles invariably get stuck. To extricate them is a long and difficult task, frequently requiring the aid of another vehicle. Soft sand is far worse than mud, and even if the wheels do not sink in it, they slip and slither all over the place, so that it is a matter of extreme luck if you do not hit a palm tree or a rock. Wheel chains are of little help, as they seem to plunge the car deeper into the sand. The only way to negotiate soft sand successfully is to drive at great speed and take a zig-zag course.

Ajman lay to the north of Sharjah, beyond the little fishing village of Hera; the distance was not more than five miles but the camels were slow and it took us an hour to reach the outskirts of the town. There are two Ajmans on the map—the town proper and the district surrounding it, which has an area of about ten square miles. Most of it is bare desert, full of *wadhis* and sandhills, but near the sea-shore there are flourishing date plantations, whereas Sharjah does not boast a single one.

The town is much pleasanter than Sharjah. The track leading to it is indescribably bad, being full of pot-holes, old wells, rocks

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

system, although the actual excavation and sinking of wells is done by negro slave labour. 312 245

The plantations at Djaidh are the largest and cover several hundred acres; the trees are exceptionally fine and tall, and the yield of dates is above average. The water used for their irrigation is drawn from deep natural wells at the foothills of Jebel Faiyah, a dozen miles away, and passes along subterranean channels by gravity flow. All along this route wells have been dug to meet this channel, in order to keep it clear of obstructions, since the walls frequently cave in and the channel becomes blocked with sand and boulders from the river bed. The depth of the channel varies from twenty to fifty feet; it is built on the Persian principle of irrigation and is said to be several hundred years old. Labourers work inside the channel, which is about twenty feet in circumference, shovelling out the loose sand and debris; this is piled into baskets, which are raised to the surface by means of a primitive pulley, which rests on a crude trestle of tree-boughs. Four labourers are employed at each well, two underground and two at the surface.

The work had not been progressing satisfactorily this year and complaints had been made to the Political Officer that the channel was congested and that an insufficient flow of water was reaching the plantations. This was a matter of some concern to the authorities, since, if the plantations were deprived of water there would be a danger of the trees dying, or at least of the fruit withering on the stems. If this occurred, thousands of Arabs would be unemployed in the autumn (the date-picking season), and the price of dates would rise out of all proportion to local incomes, as they would have to be imported from Muscat or Basrah. A great many of the inland tribes derive their livelihood from the seasonal crops, and they are well paid for picking and packing the dates. 731 464 312 245

We set off shortly after breakfast, in two four-wheel-drive trucks, the party consisting of Captain Tandy, Mr. T. F. Williamson, geologist to the Basrah Petroleum Company, Mr. Jasim bin Muhammed Kadhawi (Residency Agent at Sharjah), myself, and Sheikh Hamid bin Abdulla, a nephew of the Regent of Kalba, who has a dependency or settlement near Djaidh, the tribesmen of which maintain the wells. Owing to the grass-covered dunes and shifting sands of the direct camel route, we took the coastal road through Ajman and Hera as far as Umm-al-Quwain, a distance of thirty miles. Skirting Umm-al-Quwain, which is a small 000 487

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

487 seaport famous to mariners for its watch-towers which guard the hills behind the town, we forked right and drove along the main caravan route to Falaj-al-'Ali, which is rather rough and tortuous.

487 The first ten miles beyond Umm-al-Quwain were monotonous,
133 a flat expanse of brownish grey desert, unrelieved by the slightest
137 elevation. We were above sea-level, but the high dunes behind the town obscured all but a shimmer of blue horizon. Later we entered a *batah*, a depression or valley resembling the *Jiri* at Ras-al-Khaimah. This valley, some ten miles long, between terraces of steep sandhills, was luxuriant with acacia trees, both of the *gharf* (flat-topped) and *sumr* (tall) varieties; there were also species of furze and broom, bamboo grass, *abal* and *ashgar* bushes, camel thorn and the thorny *Spici Christi*.

It was astonishingly green, rather like an English glade, so that one half expected to find violets and primroses growing under the clumps of *neam* trees. Water must have been plentiful here, for we saw numerous wells and passed scattered groups of camels grazing on the dry grasses and *abal* bushes. Flowering plants were numerous, including one with tiny white petals, with a furry, grey-green leaf, which none of us could identify; also a yellow-
136 flowering clover which smelt like mimosa. There were a great many locusts, both hoppers in the gregarious stage, and large yellow adults (solitary stage), and I captured several specimens in the glass bottle which Captain Joyce, of the Anti-Locust Commission, had given to me. Anyone travelling in the desert is usually requested to report the presence of locusts, since the agents of the Commission are thus able to track the movements, feeding and breeding grounds of these destructive insects.

Other insects we noticed, on stopping at Falaj-al-'Ali for a smoke and a cup of tea, were large black ants with white spots, a leaf-cutter bee (*Megachile*), a large black beetle of the *Rhytinota reichei* species, grasshoppers, butterflies, including a red admiral and a comma; we also saw a 'bacon beetle', common in this part of Oman, which feeds on dry carcases. The ant was unlike any species I had ever seen in the desert. It was a quarter of an inch long, with five white spots on its back (wings); a thin, elongated neck separated the head from the body, and the spidery legs were almost a quarter of an inch from the ground, giving it a curious jerky walk. Jasim said that its bite was poisonous.

Shrikes and larks (*hamra*) darted from behind the sandstone rocks as we approached, and although we looked for their nests we found

Falaj al-Ali lay five miles beyond the camp, but we skirted the
487 town and trailed over large, gently-undulating plains, varied at intervals by rougher patches formed by the confluence of dunes and ridges. Reaching a steep escarpment with a one-in-three gradient, the truck behind us stuck firmly in the sand. The driver foolishly tried to reverse, the wheels becoming more deeply embedded than ever. We decided to abandon it until our return, leaving a coolie in charge and, by changing gears, just managed to climb the rise with our remaining truck by collecting armfuls of dead boughs and *ashgar* leaves, which we strewed over the yielding sand. It was hot work and we were exhausted by the time we had climbed back into the car.

487, 133 The end of the valley began to broaden and gave way to an open plain, the vegetation gradually thinning out until nothing but *abal* bushes were to be seen. A small gazelle, called by the Arabs *dhabi*, or in some parts *ghazal*, darted from behind a bush where it had been grazing, but it was away too quickly for us to attempt a shot; in any case, a bullet from a moving car would have been wasted. The mountains of the Shimailiyah now loomed ahead in the far distance, with the high, isolated peak of Jebel Faiyah thirty miles to the south-east. This peak, which lies beyond Djaidh, is a serrated mass of red and purple sandstone, shaped like a Welsh hat, with the twin, nippled peaks of Qualiddi beside it.

The desert road at this stage disappeared as we entered a wide, dried-up river bed, lined with fine black sand and rubble; this was alluvial deposit washed down from the mountains, and Williamson, our geologist, informed us that it was mostly basalt and igneous rock of the Eocene period, of volcanic origin. Some of the stones were striped with white and contained quartz. Basalt appears to be the geological basis of the higher peaks, intermingled with limestone and sandstone stratæ, quartz, serpentine and gypsum; there are also traces of selenite and alabaster, connected with Miocene beds, and deposits of limonite and ironstone. Further north, in the Ruus-al-Jibal, are older rocks of the Jurassic and Triassic periods, although the foothills around Djaidh are of white limestone and chalk, full of cretacious fossils.

The scenery was extremely wild and barren here, and we passed through a small gorge with high basalt cliffs, where not a shrub or a blade of grass was to be seen. The radiator was getting hot, so we stopped for half an hour to allow it to cool and also to eat our lunch. We could not have chosen a more unfavourable spot. No sooner had we sat with our backs to a large rock than the Shimal

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

started to blow, and first 'dust devils', then a great cloud of black sand, began to sweep all round us. The sandwiches were ruined, except those in one carton I had not opened, and our eyes smarted for several minutes. The gale quickly died down and we decided to leave at once; it was nearly midday and we wished to reach Djaidh before the hour of prayer.

As we drew close to Djaidh, the plantations of which we could just see through the haze, the ground became extremely rocky, the track leading over a high steppe, which we estimated to be six hundred feet above sea level; this steppe was strewn with large basalt boulders, some as large as a football, which made steering very difficult. The stones were curiously formed and highly polished, some being striped with white selenite. Williamson, who collected several specimens, told us that there is a certain amount of gold and copper in the mountains here. They are practically unexplored, although a geological survey was made of the Ruus-al-Jibal range recently, the results being published in the Quarterly Journal of the Royal Geological Society. In the passes of these hills are the strongholds of the wild and truculent Shi'hou tribe, some of whom I encountered on my last trip to Ras-al-Khaimah.

The steppe gradually sloped towards a rocky *batah*, a narrow and almost treeless valley, which was in reality a dried-up river bed; the force of the water which flung the boulders down the hillsides must have been tremendous, probably the result of a burst watershed. Williamson believes it may have occurred several thousand years ago, although in the rain season torrents of water annually wash down from the hills and a wide river flows through a mountain pass from Muraq-quibat to Kalba, where it reaches the sea. After five miles the bed narrowed into a small *wadhi*, which in turn gave way to luxuriant, park-like country, thickly wooded with tall acacias, amongst which we spotted herds of wild black donkeys.

A mile ahead was the date plantation. It was the hour of prayer, so we stopped the car and wandered through the dark, jungle-like paths while Jasim, Sheikh Hamid and the drivers said their devotions. The plantation is cross-sectioned by two wide main paths, with high enclosures of palm-leaf fencing on either side; let into this fence at intervals are little wicket gates, which lead to grass paths of a man's width running between the trees. A 'cover' crop of clover, grass and shrub is cultivated at the roots of the trees, as this

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

gives nitrogenous value to the soil. The subterranean channel rises to the surface in the middle of the plantation, where it is collected in a large cement reservoir; from this source the water, carefully controlled in volume, is conveyed by pipes and runnels into narrow ducts constructed at right-angles to the paths. Palm trees are very thirsty and require plenty of water in the hot weather.

A single *Askhari* guarded the plantation, which was noisy with the chatter of brilliantly-plumed birds; for our amusement he climbed a tall palm with the agility of a monkey, using a rope-sling as a support, and dexterously cut a bunch of male flowers for our inspection. The flowers, which have a sickly sweet smell, are tightly packed in a tough protective sheath; these sheaths are sold, when ripe, and used to pollinate the female palms. They are also edible, being very palatable when boiled and eaten with butter sauce. When, a few months later, I passed through Djaidh, the green dates were already forming, and labourers were high in the trees, tying veils of muslin around them to protect them from insects. The dates which are intended for export are gathered when they are light brown, that is, half-ripe, and are often packed with the stalk attached. The Arabs usually prefer them fully ripe, when the colour is dark brown; over-ripe dates are used for the manufacture of syrup which, when crystallized, makes a good brown sugar. Hives are often kept in the vicinity of the plantations and the air was full of their buzzing as we passed through the glades.

Before we reached the encampment we passed the ruins of an old fort. Nothing but the outer shell remained and the gateway had long since lost its magnificent doors; the walls were of rose-pink clay and mortar, and the crumbling tower was crenellated like the ramparts of a mediæval French castle. Sheikh Hamid told us that the fort originally belonged to his grandfather, Sheikh of Kalba, who at one time included Djaidh among his possessions; but a succession of tribal wars had decreased the influence of the Kalba clan and Djaidh had degenerated into neutral ground.

The road to the encampment was a mere body-wide track through tall grass, so high in places that we could not see ahead. Presently two little Arab boys, leading an emaciated bull, greeted us as the truck emerged from this forest and entered a wide, muddy river bed. Here we saw the first of the wells. A gang of labourers was busily letting down baskets into the main channel, while the tribesmen looked on. The headman, a fine-looking old Arab

The headman[1], a fine-looking old Arab with a white beard and keen eyes, came forward to greet us and introduced us to the local gentry. 516

They shook us by the hand, the kiss of honour being reserved for Sheikh Hamid alone. Salim bin Raschid, the headman, amazed us by declaring that he had anticipated our visit. When we enquired how this was, he merely shook his head and smiled. The only explanation I can give is that some servant of the Residency Agent's at Sharjah had passed the information to a friend, and that the news had been conveyed to Djaidh by a passing caravan. The argument against this is that the decision to make the journey was only made by Captain Tandy the day previously, although he had discussed it with Jasim.

The headman allowed me to take a photograph of him and insisted on shaking my hand again when I had done so. The Arabs do not shake hands vigorously, as we do, but in a gentle, feminine way, letting the tips of their fingers linger in your palm. Accompanied by the notables, we inspected the wells, where stalwart young negroes at once assumed an air of great preoccupation and began hauling at the winches and emptying the full baskets which came up. We peered down the well and could just see the heads of the labourers working in the channel. The headman said they had just cleared the well base after a heavy fall of sand, and had increased the height of the roof to eight feet. He assured Tandy that the work was making good progress and that he would be personally responsible to the Sheikh of Sharjah for its continuance. 312

We spent half an hour at the wells, where Tandy and Williamson engaged in technical discussions with the Arab engineers, and then took the road leading to the Beni Quitab encampment. No one seemed to know quite where it was, except that it lay towards the lower slopes of Jebel Faiyah, and was about twelve miles distant. Salim lent us a couple of guides, who clung precariously to the running board as we plunged across the river bed and sped up the steep, grass-covered banks. Here we entered a country which looked very much like the veldt of South Africa; in fact, just the sort of terrain in which one expects to find lions. 487 133

This country, called by the Arabs *Marbakh abu Laila*, extends at the foot of the mountains from Muraq-qibat to Baraimi, a distance of nearly a hundred miles, and is about ten miles in width. It is completely wild, the haunt of gazelle, hares, mountain wolves and occasionally the rare, long-horned oryx. It was here, many years ago, that Williamson shot a leopard, an animal which previous 487 133 136

1[at Djaidh -- Analyst]

travellers had declared did not exist in Oman. There was no road and the ground was hard and very bumpy, full of holes and nullahs. Tall grasses and shrubs grew in profusion, including *shinan* and the sea-green *harm* as well as some *Hadh* bushes, indicative of recent rain or heavy dews. The yellow flowers of the *zahr* blossomed in abundance, attracting myriads of insects, whilst several hares darted ahead of our truck and scurried away into their holes. The acacia (*samr*) trees grew in thin copses and were frequently fifteen feet high, which is unusual in this part of the desert.

When we had traversed five miles of this wooded country without so much as a trace of human life, our guides became nervous and begged to be allowed to return to Djaidh. We let them go, giving them a handful of biscuits and some tobacco as a gift, but before they left us they pointed to a site some two miles ahead where, they said, the *Badu* had last encamped. When we came upon this site we did, indeed, find the remains of a camp, the grass being lighter in patches than the surrounding herbage, whilst nearby was an old well and the dead embers of a fire. But of the *Badu* there was no sign.

We sat on a hillock for a few minutes, drinking tea, while Tandy and Williamson made a survey of the land; there were no tracks to guide us and nothing to indicate where the *Badu* might have concealed themselves. Sheikh Hamid, an amusing raconteur, recounted tales of the Beni Quitab tribe. These nomads number several thousand and, split into various sections, they roam all over the Oman country; branches of this tribe are to be found in the Nejd and Kuwait, but these have separate sheikhs and do not owe allegiance to Mohammed bin Ali. They are a wild, simple people, despising both the town dwellers and those who work with their hands. They live on dates, which they mostly steal, camels' milk, fish and rice. Some of these commodities they are obliged to buy, and the money for this purpose they obtain by selling camels, animal skins, including wolves, lizard and ibex; donkeys, wild honey, cheese and gazelle meat.

The Beni Quitab are famous camel breeders and during our trip across the *Marbakh* we saw large herds of these animals with their calves. They also breed donkeys, capturing the wild asses when young, and gather wild honey from the plains. Although they do as little work as possible, they cultivate small patches of ground to which they return twice a year, growing millet and tobacco, which they smoke in tiny pipes with cane stems.

171

CHAPTER XVI

IN February, 1945, the British Resident of the Gulf, Sir Geoffrey Prior, called a conference of the Trucial sheikhs at Baraimi. Baraimi was chosen as the site for the 'durbar' because it is in neutral territory and is practically the only part of Oman over which none of the sheikhs has suzerainty. It lies at the base of the Trucial political division, and is the meeting place of all the main caravan routes from Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sohar (on the Gulf of Oman side of the peninsula) and Ras-al-Khaimah. Roughly ninety miles south-east of Sharjah, Baraimi, which lies in the middle of a large oasis, is geographically the north-eastern extremity of the great Rub-al-Khali desert. It was from here that I began my journey into that desert later in the year.

For centuries Baraimi has been a centre of the slave trade; lying as it does between the western and eastern coasts of the peninsula, the terminus of the main Oman caravan routes, it is ideally situated for this purpose. In the heyday of the slave traffic, slaves were brought here by ship either from Abu Dhabi or Sohar. The former port was used more extensively towards the end of the nineteenth century, since the suppression of piracy by British gunboats forced the Arab dealers to lie low in the Persian Gulf until they could unload their cargoes.

To-day, there is no direct importation of negro slaves from the African coasts, but a secret traffic exists in the sale of young ex-slaves, negroes and Persians, who are abducted by raiding Bedouins from the villages and towns. These unfortunates are taken to Baraimi, over which territory the British Government has no treaty rights, and are sold in the open market. There is no fixed day for these sales, the dates often being changed or delayed for days and weeks, in order to delude any officials or Government agents who may be in the vicinity. The Political Officers and Indian Government officials with whom I discussed the matter categorically denied that there was a traffic in slaves, but I had evidence to the contrary and determined to find out for myself what truth there was in the stories I had heard.

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

number whose exportation from their native countries has been altogether prevented by British naval and other measures. 567

I have been informed that a regular slave market also exists at the small town of Harfit, as well as at Baraimi, the former being a region owned jointly by the Sultan of Muscat and the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi, although it is too far from the Sultan's seat to make the enforcement of police measures feasible. Several official delegations have been despatched to Baraimi and Harfit in the past to investigate the slave trade, but the Bedouins, who are the principal slave dealers, have a highly-developed intelligence service and long before the approach of any foreigner or political agent the slaves are concealed and the market closed. This deception makes it extremely difficult to obtain any direct evidence. When taxed with the matter, the sheikhs will deny most emphatically that the importation or sale of slaves takes place in their territories.

One sheikh, who was charged a few years ago with aiding and abetting the dealers, went so far as to admit that slaves were imported by Bedouins from Oman proper into the Trucial Oman Coast by caravan. It has also been reported that numbers of slaves are exported to Qatar by sea, but this has not been verified.

On the occasion of Sir Geoffrey Prior's visit to Baraimi, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I informed him that I suspected that a slave market existed there and asked if I could accompany him on his journey. Unfortunately, he declined, and I was very disappointed at the time, for not only had I wished to investigate for myself the tales of slave-dealing in this district, but I also desired to be present at the 'durbar', since it is very seldom that all the principal sheikhs and headmen of the Trucial Oman Coast can be met together. At first it was decided that the sheikhs should meet at the Fort and, after some refreshment, repair to Baraimi by car, but Mohammed bin Ali and several other sheikhs were averse from coming to the camp, and the meeting place had to be changed to Baraimi itself. 000

Not long after the departure of Sir Geoffrey for Bushire, I persuaded the Khan Bahadur Abdur bin Razzak to lend me a reliable guide and, accompanied by an American friend and two Askhari guards, I set out for Baraimi in a jeep. The journey occupied about five hours each way, the route taken being via Dubai and the wild, trackless country west of Yidaiyah, which consists for the most part of dunes and high ridges, undulating 487 133

000 Instead of venturing a thousand miles into the Great South Desert, we were now restricted to three hundred at the most, for I was obliged to limit the outward journey to seven days; the trip from Sharjah, our starting point, to Baraimi and Nimairiyah, we proposed to make by car, and this would shorten the journey by a hundred miles, leaving us a maximum of two hundred to cover in the seven days at my disposal. On April 10th, 1945, we made our final arrangements, packed our tents and baggage, and set out for Baraimi on the following day. Accompanying Schultz and I in the truck were Suliman Beg, Khofan bin Salim and Muhammed bin Hadi, our Askharis; the guides, trackers and other members of Sheikh Raschid's party had left with the camels two days previously and were to meet us at Nimairiyah.

• 487 The journey to Baraimi,* which I had previously visited, was without incident and after a brief rest in the oasis for refreshment, we continued along the rough caravan route until the village of [361] Bahairan, south of Wadhi Talaif, was reached just before sunset. There were several good wells in the district, so we were able to replenish our water-bottles. The town appeared to be deserted, except for an encampment of Bedouins, who did not, however, approach us; we decided to push on a little further and spend the night in the desert. Five miles ahead we found a small depression covered with *neam* trees and camel thorn, and here we pitched our tents; Suliman Beg cooked a meal of rice, bully beef and chipatties over a wood fire, proving his mastery of the culinary arts to be no mere boast, and after coffee and a smoke we turned in.

At dawn we once again set out after a quick breakfast and followed what we thought was the caravan route; after a few miles the track disappeared in a shallow *wadhi* full of boulders and shrubs and, on taking our bearings, we found we were several miles off our course. After a delay of two hours we found the route once more and reached Nimairiyah shortly after ten o'clock. The caravan was waiting by one of the wells, and Hamid bin Rahman, the Murra guide, greeted us with enthusiasm. We had promised him a present of a hundred rupees, in addition to his pay, if he could lead us to the lost city, and he was so eager to claim his reward that I am sure its ruined towers and ramparts were already mirrored in his mind.

487 During the process of transferring our equipment from the car
361 to the baggage camels, we had our lunch and took some photographs of Nimairiyah, a typical Arab settlement built around a

* [From Sharjah -- Analyst]

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

small oasis with wells and a date garden. We were presently joined by a crowd of Bedouins who peered at us in wonder, and when Hamid informed them that we were proceeding into the Rub-al-Khali they began to laugh. An aged *Badu*, who inspected our car with great interest, threw up his hands and shouted: 'Inshillah, but they must be mad!'

Mad or not, we were determined to proceed with our journey without delay and, as soon as our Arabs has said their midday prayers—with a special invocation for the protection of Allah during our entry into the unknown—we mounted our camels and set forth. Musa, the driver who was to take the car back to Sharjah, gave us a cheerful send-off, betraying relief that he was not included in the party, and leaving the caravan route on our right we cantered over the desert in the direction of Latir, the site of a disused well.

After five hours of fairly comfortable travel we reached the district known as Dhafra, which is composed of flat, waterless desert relieved by occasional dunes and patches of *andab* grass. We stopped here to allow the camels to graze and pitched our tents under the shoulder of a sandhill. We estimated that we were approximately a hundred miles south-west of Baraimi, and east of the Manasir desert. Schultz and I climbed to the top of a dune to watch the sun sink below the horizon; the desert stretched out on every side as far as the eye could see, and we appeared to be in the centre of a vast, treeless plain. A desert sunset is an unforgettable sight and quite unlike anything one sees in Europe; banners of scarlet and gold are unfurled in the sky, the clouds glow with a translucent iridescence, and, as the stars appear one by one, at first pale and glimmering, then with the brightness of white fire, a purple haze covers the desert. Shadows lengthen from the dunes until they merge in the twilight gloom and then, as if a curtain had been drawn across the world, night falls suddenly in folds of cold, black silence.

The next day we continued southwards through the Liwa region to Idd, where we were fortunate to find an old well with water at ten fathoms. It lay in a bush-covered hollow of the dunes and the cameleers set to with a will to open up the shaft which had fallen in. Hamid reckoned that the well had not been used for many years and was surprised to find any water there. He gave me a taste of it from his goat's-skin, but it was horribly brackish and I was glad we had a good supply in our water-bottles.

The camels were exceedingly thirsty and greedily drank the dirty grey water which Sayid bin Salih, the cameleer, brought to them in a bucket. There were a few crops of the *abal* bush for them to graze upon, and Hadi put some of these in his pot to boil with the rice, as a substitute for vegetables.

We had made good progress so far and were four days out from Sharjah; although it was early afternoon when we reached Idd the weather was hot and humid, the barometer registering 90° F. There was no point in tiring either the camels or ourselves, so we decided to encamp here for the night. The Arabs lay down under their tents and went to sleep, whilst Schultz and I explored the neighbourhood. As far as the eye could see the desert was bare of vegetation, with occasional dunes and ridges of hard sand and limestone conglomerate. In the distance, by the aid of our glasses, we could see the dim outlines of a peak or large hillock, which we estimated to be fifty miles due south of our camp.

The desert sloped gently away from Idd towards an unbroken steppe, littered with outcrops of volcanic rock and sandstone boulders. Two miles away we were surprised to find a shallow depression, about two hundred yards long, with pink sandstone walls rising to fifty feet in places. These cliffs were studded with tiny fossil shells, similar to the molluscs I had picked up on Sharjah beach. The skeleton of an ibex, still covered with its skin, lay in the sand beside a dead *abal* bush. The creature had evidently died from starvation. Of other forms of animal life there were no signs, and we did not even see an insect in this pit of death; on our way back to the camp, however, Schultz spotted a fork-tailed lark, which, according to Mr. Philby, is one of the few birds which inhabit the interior of the Rub-al-Khali.

Ahmed bin Aziz, one of the guides, greeted us with some excitement when we got back to the camp and said he had seen a bustard (*houbari*) flying overhead; he had fired at it, but it was too high to hit. Neither Schultz nor myself had heard a shot, which we supposed was due to the curious formation of the dunes, which had a trick of muffling sound. We had heard that there were so-called 'singing sands' in this region, which gave forth a booming sound, but the guides were unable to give us any information concerning this. In the camp we found a small mantis and two red spiders but, owing to the scarcity of vegetation, there was scarcely any animal life here.

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

000 Curiously enough, I was reading a similar passage from the Koran, the Chapter of the Ant, which ran:

'It was said unto her, Enter the palace. And when she saw it, she imagined it to be a great water; and she discovered her legs, by lifting up her robes to pass through it. Whereupon Solomon said unto her, Verily this is a palace, evenly floored with glass. Then said the Queen, O Lord, verily I have dealt unjustly with my own soul, and I resign myself.'

The camels were getting restless and Hamid ordered the men to take them out to graze. Here two of the she-camels were milked and they growled viciously. Dusk was falling and we had an early supper and retired to bed. Two days remained to us for the journey westwards, and we were eager for what the future held in store.

487 133 We continued our journey the next day in a southerly direction, leaving on our left the site of an old Bedouin encampment known as Umm al 'Amad, which has a hillock and a single *sawr* tree, but no wells that we could see. This region the Arabs call Al Maharadh. The sands were covered with curious round pebbles and black stones, some of them sharp enough to cut the camels' feet so that two of the beasts had to be bound. The going was very rough and we made slow progress, the distance for that day not exceeding twenty-five miles. There was no herbage for the camels to eat, so we had to feed them on the rations which Hamid had wisely provided for such a contingency. Our own supplies were running fairly low, and Schultz and I gave up the luxury of shaving and rationed ourselves to a pint of water each a day, which we supplemented with camels' milk.

Ten miles ahead we encountered a series of high sand ridges which made our progress even more cumbrous, and in the valleys between these dunes the sand was often dangerously soft and deep. Several times our camels' legs were submerged as far as their knees. I thought of the moving sands at Dahna, which Wrede, the explorer, had encountered over a century ago, and wondered whether these contained similar pitfalls. We decided not to go ahead, but to take a course due south-east in the direction of Qara. By so doing we were able to ride on the crest of the dunes, which run in a north-westerly curve, and avoid the dangerous sinking sands.

It was as well that we did so, for we were told later by a party of Bedouins whom we encountered on the return journey, that these sands get worse and worse towards the western desert and have swallowed up whole caravans of camels. We were fortunate from another point of view. When about ten miles from Qara, Abdulla, the ex-slave, who was walking beside the leading camel, suddenly gave a great shout. He pointed towards the shimmering horizon and, shading our eyes, we could just see the flat summit of a large hill which seemed to rise steeply out of the desert. It was one of those curious rock formations one sometimes sees in the Rub-al-Khali, and we decided to ride towards it. From the summit we might obtain a good view of our surroundings, for we had lost our bearings, and were not quite sure whether Qara lay behind or ahead of us.

At four o'clock in the afternoon, after a hard gallop across the sands, we reached the slopes of the hill, which was about five hundred feet above sand-level. The summit, which I estimated was a thousand yards long, was as flat as a billiard table, and the crumbling sandstone cliffs were precipitous and slippery. The camels were left grazing on some *harm* bushes at the foot of the hill, while Schultz, Hamid and I climbed the rock, reaching the summit after a stiff climb. It was not quite as flat on top as we had imagined. The sides were smooth and covered with a layer of sand, but in the centre there was a large bowl-shaped depression with gently-sloping sides. The slopes were profuse with vegetation, including stunted *gharf* and *samr* bushes, and a short, dry grass with razor-like edges. What took our breath away, however, was the sight of a derelict town at the base of this bowl.

The buildings covered about two acres, and were surrounded by a low wall of crumbled sandstone blocks, which at one time had been much higher. Most of the buildings were a mass of rubble, so that it was difficult to distinguish houses or streets, but two of the towers were still standing; these measured thirty feet in circumference and were forty feet high. The tops were not crenellated like the fort towers of Oman, but smooth and unembellished, with small lookouts through which one had a good view of the surrounding desert. The walls themselves were in places four feet thick, the stone blocks—the largest of which measured two feet in length and eighteen inches in width—being held together by a rough mortar made of gypsum and clay.

We asked Hadi how old he thought the city was, and he pulled

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

172 at his dirty grey beard before answering. 'Praise Allah, but it must be a thousand years,' he answered. 'In all my days I have never seen such a city as this; it is not built as we Arabs build, but is more like your foreign buildings.'

Being neither archæologists nor historians, we could not conjecture the age or the probable origins of this strange town on the hilltop. None of our Arabs had heard of it before, and it is not near any of the caravan routes or Bedouin encampments. Small lakes of water lay at the flat end of the bowl, suggesting that there is no lack of moisture during the rainy season; this would explain the abundance of vegetation we found growing there. One curious feature of the ruins were the large circular stone discs, the size of a cartwheel, with a hole in the centre with rays, roughly hewn with some blunt instrument, extending like spokes to the rim. These discs were composed of a hard white limestone and were about four inches in thickness across the rim. Hamid also found a piece of broken black pottery, with a high glaze, which I took back with me and presented to the Sheikh of Al 'Ajman.

Was this, I wondered, the 'lost city' of the Rub-al-Khali, whose whereabouts has for centuries been a theme of fascinating speculation amongst explorers and travellers? If it were not the fabled seat of the legendary King 'Ad, then perhaps it was the seat of a lost tribe which had wandered across the desert and made its home far from the haunts of men on the top of an isolated hill. The truth we may never know, but any archæologist who wishes to follow in our footsteps and find this city for himself will doubtless be able to estimate its approximate age and reconstruct the plan of its buildings; excavation may even yield the secret of its origin and bring to light evidences of the tribe which built it in the dim past.

That night we encamped at the foot of the hill, the Arabs climbing to the top to obtain water and grass for the camels. Suliman refused to go up, however, insisting that the ruins were haunted by a malevolent djinn. To banish his fears we lit a huge fire of brushwood, for the night was cold, and smoked our pipes in content. I for one felt that our journey had been worth while and that we had accomplished something which no other foreign travellers had succeeded in doing.

● 487 In the morning, when the haze had lifted, we had a closer view of the desert from the summit, and Schultz, looking through his field-glasses, observed a clump of trees which he thought might be

Qara. This indeed it turned out to be, Qara lying ten miles due west of the ruins. We set out on the return journey soon after breakfast, feeling refreshed and energetic and, turning due north, passed through Bil Hanna on our way to Umm al 'Amad. Here we came upon our old tracks and the next day branched north-east to Qutuf, a distance of thirty miles, leaving Idd ten miles to the north.

The journey back was uneventful; the desert was much firmer and less rocky than had been our previous route and, the camels being able to travel at a good pace, we reached Wahaida on the third day; here we found a well, with brackish water at twelve fathoms. Schultz shot a bustard which was feeding in some scrub and we roasted it for our evening meal. The journey north to Nimairiyah occupied two days, the route passing through Hadhi, where we found two disused wells; the thirty-five miles between Hadhi and Nimairiyah were desolate in the extreme, without a sign of water or vegetation, and we were exhausted and parched by the time we reached Nimairiyah, on the fifth day after leaving Qara.

Nimairiyah was reached at five o'clock in the afternoon, and there was no sign of the car. We spent the night in an encampment of Bedouins, who were amazed to hear that we had been as far west as the Al Maharadh country, which, they said, is wild and dangerous. They were most hospitable, however, and gave us dates, rice and coffee. At eight o'clock the next morning Musa, our driver, appeared with the car; he explained that he had been detained at Baraimi, where he had had a breakdown. Knowing that he had relatives there, we smiled at this explanation. Our baggage was soon transferred from the camels to the car and, after paying off our Arab friends and bidding them farewell, we set off on the way back to Baraimi and Sharjah.

The memory of this expedition will remain with me for the rest of my life; it was the only form of exploration I have ever been able to undertake, and I could be well satisfied with the result. Had I been accompanied by an archæologist, c . been equipped with tools and scientific instruments, there is no doubt that my discovery would have been a much more valuable record than it actually is. Unfortunately, I was pressed for time and was unable to undertake any kind of excavation. Had one the opportunity to re-visit Arabia and form an expedition composed of experts, I have no doubt that the ruins of Qara would yield surprising secrets to the world.

312 When one is travelling from well to well a
487 long rope is an essential article of equipment, for there is seldom any at the well-head itself. The water raised *en route* was warm and sulphurous, but in Wadi Qör, the pass through the Hajar Range, we found shallow pools of rain-water among the rocks, and although it must have been very stale it was considerably more palatable than the well-water. Wadi Qor is very rocky, and the three-tonner performed in an admirable manner, climbing rocks and moving forward at angles that must have been undreamed of
[721] by its makers. The party was alert and rather light on the trigger, for tribesmen continue to raid caravans going through this pass, and
487 life is very cheap in 'Oman. The track improved towards the end of the wadi and opened out onto a sandy plain tinted a pale green by a sparse covering of grass and

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[136]

sloping gently down to the sea. Gazelle were sighted, and the soldiers fired excitedly from the back of the moving truck. No hits were scored, but a friendly scuffle ensued when it was found that the person who had been firing the most had been helping himself to a companion's ammunition.

P. 190 (A)

30: Gt. Britain G-5 (ca. 1918) 1920 MJ1 Saudi Arabia
Trucial Oman MK4

E. TRUCIAL OMAN

Area

This region, formerly known as the Pirate Coast, extends for more than 300 miles from the Khōr el-'Odeid on the S. frontier of El-Qatar to the S. border of Ru'ūs el-Jibāl, the northern promontory of Oman; it receives its name from the permanent truce established between the five recognized ruling Sheikhs of **Abu Dhabi, Dibai, Shārjah, 'Ajmān,** and **Umm el-Qaiwein** by the agreement of 1853 with the British Government. Ru'ūs el-Jibāl (see p. 248) is an isolated district of the Sultanate of Oman, the Trucial frontier, between Ras Sha'am on the Gulf Coast and a spot between the villages of Dibah and Bei'ah on the Gulf of Oman, cutting it off from the bulk of the Sultan's territory. From Dibah-Bei'ah the eastern frontier follows the coast for about 50 miles to a point between Khōr Kalba and Mureir, where it turns inland, first westwards, then southwards, passing N. of the districts of Mahadhah and Jau, till it reaches that of Khatam; from this point the inland boundary is the edge of the Ruba' el-Khāli and Jāfūrah deserts, running more or less parallel to the Gulf. By far the greater part of the region, therefore, consists of low country along the Persian Gulf; only at the eastern extremity is there a mountainous district formed by the spinal range of the Oman promontory. The whole western part of this great area is little known and sparsely populated, the capitals of the five principalities affected by the truce all lying in the eastern portion.

The more important land communications of Trucial Oman converge upon the Bireimi oasis (see p. 282), which is connected by various routes with Abu Dhabi, Ras el-Kheimah, Dibai, Sohār, and Hasa. Many routes cross the peninsula, linking places on the two gulfs; such are those from Dibai to Shinās, Shārjah to Mureir, Umm el-Qaiwein to Fujeirah, and Ras el-Kheimah to Dibah.

Physical Character

The coast along the Persian Gulf is low and monotonous; the hills visible from the sea in the NE. section near Ras el-Kheimah soon recede from view. To the W. of Abu Dhabi the shore is lined by a labyrinth of shoals, reefs, and islands, rendering navigation difficult even for native boats. To the E. of that place it is open, but shallow, and exposed to the full force of the *Shamāl* (NW. wind).